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Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the Council of Youth

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The Prior of Taizé writes :

« Who is Christ for you ? » The question is asked so often. He is the One from whom I am living, yet he is also the One for whom I, along with many others, shall always be searching. How many times, with so many people, do we set off again from doubt towards faith : « I believe, help my unbelief ». And in growing older, faith becomes less arduous, certainty prevails.

Christ for us is the unique source of every commitment for mankind, be it political or otherwise. Were this not so, we should be in danger of using the name of Jesus, after the event, to cover over what has been mere projection of self.

Christ exists for himself. In spite of the silence that may endure within some of us, there is one thing that we can say to him : We believe in you even when you seem to be silent, your poverty inclines us to await and to expect... and we are there, poor and vulnerable, searching for him, holding ourselves before him so that he be our basic love and thus, directly, our essential joy.

Roger, your brother

As we prepare to give our life because of Christ, we are bearers of news to all men, without any segregation whatsoever. In this period of clandestinity, the news is transmitted from one to another, through daily living, through letters that are written, through visits that are made. This letter is an attempt to bring to light just a few instances of this great underground life.

Cameroun

(October 1971) « Newbell Station, Douala. A number of young people are waiting for their brothers from Libamba and Yaoundé. The arrival of their guests sets off an explosion of joy. Prayers and meditation together before the two questions for discussion are introduced... Dieudonné draws everybody's attention to the fact that the Council of Youth is not a movement but that its preparation is lived in all kinds of milieux : (classrooms, factories, different groups) through fraternal sharing, a strong charity, a spirit of tolerance and of pardon. Then come the questions :

— What is the most difficult thing in my life at the present time ?
— Living a life where there is no injustice means living as brothers. But then who is my brother ?
— How can I live my daily life so that man be no longer victim of man ?

A driving school instructor. *"I have got to serve rich and poor alike. In the place where I work there is no dialogue between instructors and the garage mechanics. Unlike the rich students, those who are poor cannot offer presents to the instructors, so they are neglected, in comparison. I get along with the mechanics, but how can I help the poor without inciting the hatred of my collegues ? I feel this is too much for me on my own. One idea I have is to join a trade union. There I can emphasise the cause of the poor and bit by bit bring my collegues round to sharing my ideas. Then those who are despised will see their situation get better."*

At the end of the meeting somebody said : *"Now each one of us is going back to the difficulties and the problems that we have discussed during these three days : problems of studies, being out of work, injustice, tribalism, etc. But we shall be aware that it is Christ who suffers with us in our difficulties. We shall meet together in cells. And it will be festival everytime ! And when we meet in street, we shall ask for news of the preparation for the Council of Youth."* » *(Henri)*

TAIZÉ : EASTER MEETING 1972

The next stage in the preparation for the Council of Youth will be announced on Easter Monday.

The great Easter Meeting will probably be held from the evening of Thursday, March 30, thru the afternoon of Monday, April 3.

Make travel arrangements now. Information and registration forms for the Meeting will appear in the next *Letter from Taizé.*

Italy

« In Venetia, for several years a few of us have been living an experience of liberation by means of culture. The announcement of the news at Easter 1970 has led us beyond the stage of merely "an experience to be undertaken for others" to that of giving of the whole of our life. We are involved in a school for adults : workers, peasants, young apprentices. Here, it was urgent to make culture accessible to everyone. We are working for the diffusion of a common culture which permits equality of language, making it possible for everyone to understand the basic significance of, for example, democracy, participation, trade union, etc. We are trying to live an experience of non-institutionalized schooling, where there is neither professor nor pupil, a place of communion where we set one another free. Several workers who have been here since the beginning are now leaders of the school, in addition to their work. The program, which must lead to a State school examination, has evolved under the influence of the experience we have lived together. For example, history has become the principal subject. From it we go on to study the other fields. Through the study of history, especially the history of the poor, we can see how man has searched after new worlds : this leads to geography ! Scientific observation is the pivot of scientific subjects. The study of languages has made us seek contacts with other people far away and with movements and communities. Some of our groups are preparing to share this experience with the peasants in the surrounding villages. » (Georgio, Vana and others)

Youth from Europe are making trips to the southern continents and youth from the South are travelling in northern countries. These visits, informal, «clandestine», aim to express the will to live reciprocity and interdependence between the youth of different continents.

« ... The more time goes by, the more I discover that we are all the object of exploitation. Yet at the same time I am discovering the great solidarity between workers that is so natural that it is never talked about. There is flagrant injustice. As a checker, you have no right to a bonus, simply because you are at the end of the assembly line and you are forced to follow the rhythm of the girl who is on the machine. You are doing the same amount of work as her but she gets a bonus! So what is important at present is to try to get people to see that this is not normal. There are six checkers; the moment that the five others no longer accept their not having a bonus, we can act, altogether. But right now I am the only one who does not accept this and who says so. I reckon that gestures of solidarity are not valid if they go no further than themselves, if they do not lead to claims. That is quite a discovery! It means that above all there must be somebody who accepts getting his hands dirty in order to get things moving. But the other girls aren't ready yet. So, let's wait...

I have just come back from the trade union headquarters. I went over just to see, because there is no union branch in the factory itself. "Have you come to collect a membership card or to commit yourself?" The question pleased me. For its advancement, the working class has no need of mere adherants. I am catching on. I took my card in order to commit myself, for it is a first step that later on will lead me much further, in solidarity with everyone. But first of all I must try to get the girls to become conscious of the situation.» (Huguette)

At years end, international cell-groups are travelling in the United States, in East and West French-speaking Africa, English-speaking East Africa, India and the Far East, and throughout the whole of Europe.

Portugal

During their trip in Portugal, Chantal and Henry wrote down the words of a boy whom they had met and listened to : « *For me, I will never be a soldier. I am a man dressed as a soldier. My job is looking after olive trees, the tree of peace. I had never even thought of ever using a rifle. Today I am leaving for Africa. Why ? What for ? I will never know ! I am a man dressed as a soldier, but try to understand that whatever happens to me, I will remain a human being, and to live the real meaning of the olive branch.* » On their return to Taizé, they brought back a symbolic olive branch which had been given them by a boy leaving for war.

« *... At the present time it seems that "having" is the one thing that makes "being" possible. Poverty is an evil to be fought or covered up. Weakness is held in contempt. Living an interior adventure with Christ... that is quite a story ! It is the progressive discovery of a vulnerability within oneself, of a poverty that becomes grace. And so there comes the transformation of my way of looking at institutions, at the Church. My hardness in respect to them was the rebound from my own suffering and from my ignorance. Their weakness seemed to me to be clouding the face of Christ. I was hard of heart. I was rich... indeed !*

And I love this Church that is poor, this Church that is suffering and that is giving birth from a poverty that is still greater. In the preparation for the Council, I am so struck to see how much we are living the Church. A strong tie with young people in every corner of the earth. A tie that is in no way juridical nor coersive, but through Christ, with Him and in Him. » *(Michèle)*

« This evening I have just come back from a meeting in upstate New York. There was over one hundred young people thinking and discussing the preparation for the Council of Youth.

It is not easy to be young in the United State at the present time. Many are paying the price of their convictions in prison, or being obliged to leave their jobs or break off their studies. Nobody had come to the meeting in order to escape from or to solve all the problems, but rather to search for courage and light. We came away with a tremendous hope. » *(Joe)*

« Leaving our homes to go to Taizé we lived a death... our death. We dealt with this in saying that we were preparing, "to give our life so that man be no longer victim of man". Then, learning to share self with other people... was a rising from the dead. There we were in Taizé to make other people aware of our problems and to become aware of theirs. As Rickie said : *"This is a place where we can lay down our burdens, where the oppressed can gather together to live a celebration."*

Through the searching together, we became strong, we began to want to return to our everyday situations so as to share the joyful news with our brothers. This desire became a challenge during the last days that we spent togeher. We came face to face with the challenge when we left the plane : in Chicago, New York, Mobile, Boston. We were no longer a group ; on our own, we had to follow this challenge through to the hilt. » *(Ed)*

Lebanon

Last Easter, three girls were sent to the Lebanon for one year. « *In the Middle East, where the tensions are so serious, I've really discovered that one cannot permit onself to live without a strong and demanding commitment for the oppressed. We have tried to do this by going in turn to work in the Palestinian Hospital. A rabbi from France said recently : "Christ is a Palestinian refugee. I'm a Jew, and I can see this. But why are the Christians so blind ?" It is true that the Palestinian cause seems lost. But must Christians give up when the cause of the poor is lost ? On the personal level, this is making us go thoroughly into the meaning of giving up one's privileges day by day and challenging us to live out our commitment towards all who are poor, whoever they may be. In these surroundings which give no security and where one is sometimes afraid for the others and for one's self, we are trying to enter into the dynamism of struggle without losing sight of the person in front of us, so as to be a leaven of reconciliation.* » *(Nicole, Christine, Nicole)*

« I'm thinking about a revolution. But we're not yet ready for revolution, at least for the one that we are expecting. Take away the material privileges of a certain class, yes ! But we must give them something in return, something even more important. We must give them love. Help them progressively to understand revolution, not as a terrible frustration, but like a growth process, as an extraordinary experience in richness of living that is being offered to them. » *(Jean-Claude)*

« With the over abundance of labor, the characteristic of the workers' situation in our country is the exploitation of the working class and the more or less permanent state of injustice. The illustration of the worker that comes to mind is that of a lemon that is bought cheap and then is thrown away when everything has been squeezed out of it. Then you buy another one. In spite of the enormous exploitation, it is astonishing that we do not consider our work as mere wage earning, but as a service to our nation. We are conscious of our role in the development of our country and we are always ready to negociate with management. If a complete radicalisation of the working class, leading to violent revolution, is not to occur, then an enormous job of conscientisation must be done so that the worker may recover his dignity. The preparation for the Council of Youth comes as a hope in a desperate situation. In Taizé, I found an international solidarity for the cause of the worker. I have the impression that the Church is wakening up. But will she play her true role and will she be a leaven of our unity ? If she does then there is hope for India. » (Alfonso, Bangalore)

While Alfonso and other Indians were spending two months in Taizé, four young Europeans were travelling throughout India : *« Our first impression was in finding out the difference between our idea of India and the reality : in the streets, unbelievable animation ; a people that is living, that is working. The more we discovered the country, the more that impression was confirmed. What a contrast with the somewhat ambiguous publicity that we receive at home, trying to provoke some kind of generous reaction from us, by telling us of an India on the edge of complete anihilation. It is true that poverty here is great, it is generalised, but even among the poorest, the family living for a whole year in the street, for example, the faces are made striking by their extraordinary vitality... » (Olivier, Alberto, Rémi, Robert)*

See dossier : « Preparing the Council of Youth in India ». *Communion*, N° 3, 1971.

« I am beginning to know South America as a whole better, with its enormous problems and challenges. The more the situation appears unclear, the more we're surprised by the determination with which the young militants throw themselves into the battle. I find this an experience of faith : Here there is an unshakable faith in a plan of saving love for the people of South America, for their vocation to effectively become a human community, descent, free, fraternal. I believe that Latin America is in the process of living its Easter vigil ; but the festival exists already ; in this rigorous and fearless movement, in this agonising expectancy.

At this very time, in other parts of the world, other Christians are in the process of living other experiences. Other values are being underlined in other contexts. With the respect that I have for the originality and the diversity of other men who try in their own way to be faithful to the truth, to mankind and to Christ, I believe that there is a real place for true exchange, for an amicable interdependence and a complimentarity of wisdom. Each person knows that within the context of his own life and his own history, he will never exhaust the possibilities of man, nor the infinite energies of the Risen Christ. But it belongs to each man and to each generation to utilise a small part of that wealth, and the whole of time and of history will never be sufficient to attain to fulness. In South America, a new generation is seeking to play its role. In spite of all its limitations, all its conditioning factors, in spite of all its evident ambiguities, it is nevertheless saying something that is valid for young people in other continents. The very harshness of the struggle imprints its proper characteristics on its soul. It is for that very reason too, that it demands years that are open to the discoveries of other brothers. Exchange and reciprocity. Yet once again, it is love that sets men free ! »

(A Brasilian Bishop)

« ... For me, giving my life today means losing it through exchanging a very active, student life for a very contemplative religious life that is apparently useless and hidden.

I can scarsely understand how to live before God on behalf of others. The people of whom I am part, who are part of me to the very fibres of my being : young people, especially the university. I know that the same tensions exist within me as in them ; hope and disgust ; atheism and living faith ; richness and poverty... And my life means being in the Church before God, convinced that to do wonders and to change the face of the world, He needs only our radical and unequivocal "yes". It is only when our life is lost to our own eyes that it bears witness to one who is Other than ourselves and that, somewhere, man ceases, without our always knowing how, being victim of man. » (Marie-Claude)

Nalini is in charge of a fishing cooperative in India : « *Here, where time does not mean money, here, where human effort finds sufficient reward in receiving payment for one day's food : here, where men are glad to live, and do not accumulate wealth through the years and the only success that they desire is for their children : here, where everything is impregnated with religious belief, in life, at home, work, human relationships : here, we can grasp that man attains to fulness, not simply in a society of scientific progress, but in a heart that is burning to discover the presence of God.* »

A young priest

Rather like a response to Brother Roger's appeal concerning the priesthood, last Easter, a young priest writes :

« I do not know when, but at a certain moment in my life I was seized by Christ and he has not let me go. It would be so much easier to escape from his grasp. No doubt I will understand all this later. I am only aware of the call : "Come, follow me !" For the present, I am not sure where this call will lead me. Hence, I am often afraid, I have often tended to look back... The day came when, along with several others, I was made priest in the Church. This was a call to get on the move. I do not think that as yet I have gone very far. I thought that a few months would be enough to make people understand the Goods News. I have been in this parish for four years : who has believed in our word ?...

Being a priest today is being a man of community : of the Church, of the whole community of mankind. It means watching on behalf of the people, it means wakening people too. It means gathering together : gathering together the joy and the hopes of mankind, gathering together man's anxieties and sufferings, gathering men together. It means being the man who forces himself patiently to weave ties of love between men : ties of reconciliation, the tie of forgiveness, so that the Body of Christ may never cease to grow and be perfected... It means being to the man who remains a sinner, and who becomes the man of prayer, for himself and for all his brothers. It means continuing to be a man of faith ; the one who believes that God forgives, for God is love and who finds his joy in this, and thus continually becomes again a man of hope... »

« "You are like the first stage of a rocket that gives the thrust. Now we are going to drop you, for it is our responsability to announce and prepare for the Council". This remark was made by John, a young Madagascan, when we were on the point of leaving for Taizé after a two month stay in Madagascar.

It was poor people who had come and they sewed nuggets of gold. Others gathered them up and knew how to make them into precious jewels. We were these poor people and we watched and listened to how these jewels are prepared. Our initiator was a young Madagascan called Josephe-Ignace who shared the life of our cell-group. When he tried to describe what we were doing, he said that we were like Mary going to visit Elisabeth.

We were received in a far off village with great joy and great openess : we were considered as sons of the village. These people and the others that we met throughout the island were saying a number of things to us. They talked of their desire to group together to change the form of the traditional festivals so as to avoid the moral and financial excess that spoils their profound meaning. One young man said : "I have been living the news that you are talking about for years in my daily commitment for the reconciliation of youth... with their parents, who are shocked by them... with the work on the land, that they abandon for intellectual unemployment..." *Working so that man no longer be the victim of man is expressed in the help that some of them give to the less well-educated, who are pushed around at the mercy of the corruption of the officials.*

We saw the way in which the nuggets are worked : people listen with an attitude that is stamped with friendship and with respect. They have a proverb which says : Even a locust must be shared. » (Elisabeth, Sabine, Daniel, Pierre)

Central African Republic

One year ago a young Frenchman went to the Central African Republic on voluntary service. He and a number of young Africans form a cell-group.

« ... I had a long conversation with one of the African members of the cell. He was telling me what Christ means for him : *"He is given me back my dignity of being black. He has brought nearer the God whom we are accustomed to thinking of as far off. He has shown me that God is not separated from us, but that he suffered with us."* But then he went on to say : *"We are torn between two cultures and we do not know where to find a foothold. Unconsciously, we are living according to our customs, without being able to discern what is good and what is bad. We must find the transition between customs and Christian life."* I explained to him that we in Europe do not know either which way to turn at the present time but that we have go to search together. The cell-group meets once a week in a cabin in one of the quarters of the city. First of all, we exchange the news of the week. Then we have free discussion on a passage from the Gospel that illustrates this year's theme. Next there comes free prayers, where each one prays aloud. If a problem comes up during the exchange of news, we stop to discuss it. This week, for example, there was a problem of witchcraft in the quarter where we meet... we decided to establish a network of friendship throughout the quarter. From time to time, we try to review how we have lived the "Joyful News", individually and as a cell-group. Then we try to decide some kind of provisional commitment : ten minutes of prayer each day, for example. At the present time we could do without the weekly, organized meeting for, in fact, we see one another in each other's houses several times a week. This is truly a common life. »
(Gérard and Nestor)

« Easter 1970, Maximinio, a peasant from the North-East of Brazil, was a member of the intercontinental team that took part in the announcement of the Council of Youth in Taizé. On his return to Brazil, young people gathered round him to listen to him and to discuss the text of the news that had been announced. At first they had some difficulty in feeling really concerned by something which went so far beyond their local situation. It was only one year later that the youth movements of Recife and Olinda organized four days of discussion on two successive weekends, in the context of the preparation for the Council of Youth. The discussion was entirely given over to local questions but their motivation (and this was the first time that such a thing had happened for years) was the on going process of the preparation for the Council of Youth in other places.

After these meetings, two groups were formed, each made up of a brother from the fraternity at Olinda and two young Brazilians from Recife. Their task was to visit youth groups of the interior during July, when winter school vacations were on. One of the teams went as far as the surroundings of the Amazon, in the state of Maranho, while the other visited the neighboring state of Paraïba. The striking thing about the visits was the novelty of such contacts between youth. In the North-East, the divorce between youth of the interior and youth of the big cities is very great. Those of the interior tend to feel inferior, but they are eager for news. They are poor even though they belong to a privileged class. They cannot travel nor meet other youth and the monotony of their school vacations is great. Hence the visit of youth from the capital was a big event for them.

By these visits and by other means, a whole new work among youth is in process in the North-East. At the present time, there is evidence of a change of generations. The generation that was outraged by the events of 1964 and 1968 has become adult. The new generation of youth was not yet old enough at the time to suffer from the

situation of their country, and particularly from the incredible inequalities of the North-East. The perspective with they enter upon life is rather different to that of their elders. All the Christian youth movements had pratically gone out of existenc over the last few years. Now a whole new work is under way. Many of those who lead this work are well-informed about the preparation for the Council of Youth and take their inspiration from it. However, much time will be necessary before exchanges with youth in other countries become possible.

A number of trips are planned. A new team will return to the interior of the North-East to take part in several meetings and to visit groups of youth. Another team will visit Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uraguay.» (Renato)

NORTH AMERICA

A new series of regional meetings has been planned for CANADA and the UNITED STATES. Information on each meeting can be obtained by contacting the persons listed below :

February 3-6, QUEBEC, bilingual meeting : Marc Parent, Grand Séminaire, Université Laval, Quebec, P.Q. Canada.

February 10-13, GRAILVILLE, Ohio ; Miss Audrey Sorrento, The Grail, Loveland, Ohio 45140, Phone : (513) 683-2340.

February 17-20, NEW ORLEANS : Michael Zalatoris, 7787 Walmsley Ave., New Orleans, LA., Phone : (504) 861-9521 work, 887-01113 home.

February 24-27, New York area, location as yet to be decided. Ideas and Suggestions to : Rev. Joseph P. Frary, 1 E. 29th St., New York City, N.Y. 10016. Phone : (212) 684-6770.

March 2-5, Valyermo, CA. (80 miles from downtown Los Angeles) : Father Prior, Saint Andrew's Priory, Valyermo, CA. 93563. Phone : (805) 944-2178.

Several international cell-groups will be travelling throughout North America this winter and spring. The members of the groups are hoping to meet a wide variety of North American youth. They aim to visit those who are already committed to the Long March of preparing for the Council of Youth as well as meeting many new friends. Invitations for the cell-groups and requests for information to :

Brother Rudolf, 71 - Taizé-Community, France.

Dir., Réd., Adm. Communauté de Taizé — D.L. : n° 341 — 4e tr. 1971